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SUBJECT: ONCE AGAIN, NO DOUBLE VOTE FOR MINORITIES IN CROATIA

1. THE CROATIAN PARLIAMENT VOTED LAST MONTH TO DENY A DOUBLE VOTE TO ETHNIC MINORITY VOTERS IN THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS SET FOR NOVEMBER 23. THE "DOUBLE VOTE" WOULD HAVE PERMITTED OFFICIALLY-DESIGNATED MINORITIES TO VOTE TWICE ON ELECTION DAY, ONCE FOR GENERAL PARTY LISTS, AND ONCE FOR AN ETHNIC REPRESENTATIVE. THE ISSUE WAS BROUGHT TO THE PARLIAMENT'S COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATION, WHICH DETERMINED THAT THE CONSTITUTION, THE CONSTITUTIONAL LAW ON NATIONAL MINORITIES, AND THE ELECTORAL LAW ALL CLEARLY DEFINE THAT MINORITY MEMBERS DO NOT HAVE DOUBLE VOTING RIGHTS. SEVENTY-ONE MPS VOTED IN SUPPORT OF THE COMMITTEE, 33 OPPOSED, AND FOUR ABSTAINED. THOSE IN FAVOR OF DENYING THE DOUBLE VOTE TO ETHNIC MINORITIES INCLUDED A CROSS SECTION OF BOTH THE RULING COALITION AND OPPOSITION PARTIES.

2. MILORAD PUPOVAC, CHAIR OF THE SERB NATIONAL COUNCIL (SNV), AND CANDIDATE OF THE INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATIC SERB PARTY (SDSS), COMPLAINED ABOUT THE DECISION AND TOLD US HE PLANNED TO APPEAL IT ONCE AGAIN TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT. PUPOVAC AND FURIO RABIN, CROATIA'S LEADING ETHNIC ITALIAN MP, HAVE BEEN THE LEADING ADVOCATES PUSHING FOR A DECISION IN SUPPORT OF DOUBLE VOTING RIGHTS FOR MINORITIES.

3. DOUBLE VOTING WOULD HAVE ENSURED PUPOVAC'S ELECTION AS AN ETHNIC SERB REPRESENTATIVE TO PARLIAMENT. IN THE PREVIOUS ELECTION HE LOST THE RACE FOR THE ONLY ETHNIC SERB SEAT BY APPROXIMATELY 2,000 VOTES TO MILAN DJUKIC, WHO WON BECAUSE UP TO 80 PERCENT OF ALL ETHNIC VOTERS CHOSE TO VOTE ON THE PARTY LISTS -- LEAVING ONLY THE SO-CALLED "HARD LINERS" MORE IN SYNC WITH DJUKIC'S CONFRONTATIONAL POLITICS TO VOTE ON THE ETHNIC LIST. DOUBLE VOTING WOULD HAVE ALSO OPENED THE WAY FOR PUPOVAC TO SPEND MORE TIME ENCOURAGING MINORITY VOTERS TO SUPPORT THE RULING CENTER-LEFT COALITION -- IN EFFECT ENSURING A FUTURE POLITICAL PAYOFF FOR "DELIVERING" THE SERB VOTE TO RACAN.

4. IN THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE, MILAN DJUKIC, THE SOLE MP ELECTED IN 2000 TO REPRESENT ETHNIC SERBS IN THE SABOR, OPPOSED THE DOUBLE VOTE FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES. DJUKIC'S POSITION IS PARTLY PRAGMATIC -- IT WOULD NEVER PASS PARLIAMENT -- BUT MOSTLY PERSONAL. THE REALITY OF ONE-MAN ONE-VOTE IS THAT THE MAJORITY OF ETHNIC SERB VOTERS HAVE AND WILL VOTE FOR THE SDP AND OTHER NATIONAL PARTIES OF THE CENTER-LEFT. IF PROVIDED WITH A SECOND "ETHNIC" VOTE, MANY OF THOSE VOTERS, SOCIAL DEMOCRATS BY INCLINATION, WOULD MORE LIKELY CAST THEIR ADDITIONAL VOTE FOR PUPOVAC OR OTHER "MODERATE" CENTER-LEFT ETHNIC SERBS CANDIDATES. HENCE, DJUKIC IS CONTENT TO HAVE ONLY A SMALL PORTION OF ETHNIC SERBS VOTE ON THE ETHNIC SERB LIST BECAUSE THOSE WHO VOTE TEND TO BE MORE "HARD-LINE" NATIONALISTS. TO SOLIDIFY HIS SUPPORT AMONG SUCH VOTERS, DJUKIC IN RECENT MONTHS HAS RAMPED UP THE RHETORIC OF VICTIMIZATION OF SERBS AND CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT.

COMMENT

5. NOVEMBER 5 MARKS THE OFFICIAL BEGINNING OF CROATIA'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND THE ISSUE OF DOUBLE VOTING FOR MINORITIES IS NOW RESOLVED, AT LEAST FOR THIS CYCLE. BUT PUPOVAC PROBABLY NEED NOT WORRY SO MUCH: ONE OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE RACAN GOVERNMENT WAS TO CHANGE THE ELECTION LAW TO EXPAND THE NUMBER OF GUARANTEED SEATS IN PARLIAMENT FOR MINORITIES TO EIGHT, INCLUDING THREE FOR CROATIA'S SERBIAN COMMUNITY. THIS TIME AROUND MOST OBSERVERS THINK THERE IS ROOM FOR DJUKIC AND PUPOVAC -- AND BOTH ARE CAMPAIGNING HARD. WE SAW PUPOVAC ON THE STUMP RECENTLY IN KNIN, PUTTING ALL HIS BEST ORATORY SKILLS -- HE IS A PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB -- TO THE TEST. WHILE SOME PROPONENTS DECRY THE DENIAL OF THE DOUBLE VOTE AS A LOSS OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR MINORITY RIGHTS, THESE CONCERNS ARE PROBABLY OVER-WROUGHT.

6. BY AFFIRMING ONE-MAN, ONE-VOTE, NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES WILL HAVE MORE INCENTIVE TO BROADEN THEIR APPEAL TO ALL VOTERS REGARDLESS OF ETHNICITY, PROMOTING GREATER POLITICAL INCLUSIVENESS, ETHNIC TOLERANCE, RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS -- AND THEY WILL HAVE MORE REASON TO FOCUS ON POCKET BOOK ISSUES. FRANK

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